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RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0909
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 3332
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0596
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SUBJECT: Opening of GAM office Generates Controversy, Reveals Splits within the Movement

11. (SBU) Summary: On July 7, a small group of GAM leaders led by Muzakkir Manaf provoked controversy by announcing their intention to use the free Aceh flag as the party symbol and "GAM" - the acronym for the Free Aceh Movement - as the party name. GAM's spokesman defended the move by appealing to the Helsinki MOU and by claiming, incorrectly, that President Yudhoyono himself personally authorized the formation of a "GAM Party." The President, Vice President, and even Aceh Vice Governor have criticized the move as inconsistent with the Aceh Government Law and the Minister of Justice has said that the party will not be allowed to register. This episode has exposed the deep divisions within the GAM movement. Governor Irwandi Yusuf is out of the country and none of his closest supporters or any GAM-affiliated elected officials attended the announcement. End Summary.

GAM Opens a Political Office, Ignites Controversy

12. (U) In a small ceremony held on July 7 in Banda Aceh, former Senior GAM Commander (now Senior Coordinator for KPA, the committee for Change in Aceh, GAM's moniker within the province) Muzakkir Manaf and a small group of KPA officials formally opened a "GAM Party" Secretariat and announced that the free Aceh flag would be the party's symbol. The event was notable in that only a small number of GAM members attended; those elected to political office last December were completely absent. Irwandi was out of the country and none of his closest allies were present.

13. (U) During the ceremony, Muzakkir announced that the former rebels were making slow and steady progress in the establishment of a political party and that they had formally applied to register. The opening of the office and presentation of the party symbol were, he said, simply "routine" steps in the registration process.

14. (SBU) Despite Muzakkir's innocuous description of the event, the announcement was anything but "routine." GAM spokesperson Ibrahim Syamsudin also downplayed the controversy by misquoting section 1.1.5 of the Helsinki MOU which permits Aceh to use a regional flag and crest and by claiming, incorrectly, that the President and Vice President had authorized the use of the name and flag the previous week in a meeting with Malik Mahud.

Jakarta Responds

15. (U) When word of the GAM's claims reached Jakarta, State Secretary Hatta Rajasa told the press bluntly that GAM's claim that

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the President had authorized the formation of the party were untrue. Vice President Kalla blasted the announcement of the "GAM Party" as inconsistent with the Helsinki MOU. A police spokesman criticized GAM and also issued a warning: the police, he said, will use every means available to monitor GAM for separatist acts. He also warned GAM that while they have not yet violated the law, the police can arrest persons conspiring to take action against the country. Contacts in Aceh report that there is a constant police presence outside the new party secretariat and that the party name and symbol have been covered.

GAM Members Criticize Party Announcement

¶6. (SBU) The controversy over the party name and symbol is not limited to Government and security officials; some GAM members are displeased as well. Several Senior GAM cadres close to Irwandi told us that the office was opened without their knowledge and at least three have called the recent acts unnecessarily provocative and premature given a lack of consensus within the movement about how a political party should be organized. Though Irwandi is still out of the country and has not commented on the issue, Vice Governor Muhammad Nazar distanced himself and Irwandi from the controversy by publicly reminding "all parties" that they must follow the guidelines in the Helsinki MOU and PP20/2006, guidelines which, he said, "everyone already knows."

Will the Party be allowed to Register?

¶7. (U) Under existing laws, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights has responsibility for approving the registration of political parties. Minister of Justice Andi Mattalatta has said publicly that the party will not be allowed to register so long as it insists on using the GAM name and free Aceh flag as its symbol because they contravene regulations governing the formation of political parties as well as the spirit of the Helsinki MOU.

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Internal GAM Dynamics

¶8. (SBU) Since becoming governor, Irwandi has regularly appeared publicly with GAM "Prime Minister" Malik Mahmud and has tried to downplay the rift in the movement which opened after he entered the Governor's race against Malik's explicit instructions. The movement's steps toward the formation of the party indicate, however, that the rift has not entirely healed.

¶9. (SBU) The rift is clearly seen when looking at the party leadership structure - or the lack thereof. Invitations to the July 7 ceremony listed Muzakkir Manaf as the deputy party chief but did not indicate who would be the party head. GAM members - including those affiliated with the new party - either will not or cannot say who will be the party chief.

¶10. (SBU) Zakaria Salman, former GAM Minister of Defense, has been closely involved in forming the party, cannot say who the party head will be. Salman is an Irwandi rival who lost most of his influence when Irwandi won the election last December. He remains very close to Malik and attended the recent Malik - Yudhoyono meeting in Jakarta. According to him, Malik planned to assume the role of party chief himself but could not do so because he is not a citizen. Malik hopes, however, to "influence" the party from behind the scenes as a senior advisor. This tracks with Malik's comments to Consulate Medan.

¶11. (SBU) Salman said that Malik's second choice was to install Muzakkir Manaf as party head but was deterred from doing so after Irwandi told him that he would lead the party when it was formed. Despite this, said Salman, Irwandi has not yet agreed to lead this "GAM Party."

¶12. (SBU) Some other GAM-affiliated elected officials have not bought into the "GAM Party" either. One local leader, the Regent of East Aceh, criticized the way the party was being established and told us that he has not been consulted. He worries that Malik will

try to appoint others to lead the party in his district, something he and other local leaders would find unacceptable. Malik must accept that, he said, or get out of the way. Other observers concur that without the support of the GAM-affiliated government officials, the party will not be viable.

¶12. (SBU) General Zainal Arifin, the head of the Aceh Peace, Communication and Coordination Forum, blames the current controversy on Malik Mahmud. He believes Malik was looking for ways to build support and reassert his authority within the GAM movement. Using the flag and GAM name, Arifin said, was Malik's way of throwing red meat to low-level GAM members, many of which are not satisfied with the government and resent the economic success enjoyed by some GAM leaders. If Malik is to regain his former influence, said Arifin, this is one way to do it. Because the Government will not approve the formation of the party as currently proposed and because he does not believe Irwandi will go along with the scheme, he said, Malik's effort is almost certainly doomed to fail and he will likely lose out in the process.

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